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FM AMCONSUL CASABLANCA
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 8063
INFO RUEHAS/AMEMBASSY ALGIERS 2987
RUEHBP/AMEMBASSY BAMAKO 0277
RUEHEG/AMEMBASSY CAIRO 0880
RUEHRY/AMEMBASSY CONAKRY 0038
RUEHDK/AMEMBASSY DAKAR 0297
RUEHLC/AMEMBASSY LIBREVILLE 0056
RUEHLO/AMEMBASSY LONDON 0373
RUEHMD/AMEMBASSY MADRID 3813
RUEHNK/AMEMBASSY NOUAKCHOTT 2348
RUEHFR/AMEMBASSY PARIS 0651
RUEHRB/AMEMBASSY RABAT 8309
RUEHTU/AMEMBASSY TUNIS 2107
RUEHYD/AMEMBASSY YAOUNDE 0096

C O N F I D E N T I A L CASABLANCA 000093

SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: DECL: 05/08/2018
TAGS: [PGOV](#) [ELAB](#) [ECON](#) [ETRD](#) [MO](#)
SUBJECT: STRIKES ON THE HORIZON DESPITE GOM OFFER

REF: A) Casablanca 0087

- B) Casablanca 0086
- C) 07 Casablanca 0198

Classified By: Principal Officer Douglas C. Greene for Reasons 1.4
(b), (d).

1. (SBU) Summary: Following a surprisingly weak turnout on what many though would be well attended May Day celebrations, Prime Minister Abbas El Fassi announced that he would implement his offer to increase monthly minimum wage, lower some income taxes and increase other social benefits. In response to El Fassi's decision to implement the offer, which was recently rejected by Moroccan labor unions, the unions have called for general strikes. While at least three major unions have called for a general strike on May 13, one of the largest and most vocal unions, the Democratic Confederation of Labor (CDT), has decided on May 21 for its action. End Summary.

Mild Mannered May Day March

2. (SBU) Leading up to Morocco's May 1 festivities, many local labor leaders speculated that this year's march had the potential to be the largest in recent history. For the first time in many years, Moroccan laborers were facing a number of major issues which provoked strong emotions from members: rising food prices, the failure of the social dialogue (Ref A), and two recent fatal factory fires, caused by owners' disregard for safety regulation (Ref B). However, participation was barely more than in recent years: between 20,000 and 35,000 participants from the two largest labor unions, CDT and the Moroccan Union of Labor (UMT)

3. (C) Despite low turnout, the participants made clear their dissatisfaction with the current economic situation in Morocco. Food prices took center stage with union members displaying large replicas of cooking oil bottles and sacks of sugar during a rally sponsored by the governing Istiqlal Party-affiliated, General Union of Moroccan Workers (UGTM). The deaths of 58 Moroccan citizens in a horrific factory fire were also a prominent theme. The CDT march was itself delayed by Moroccan police due to their concern over the participation of family members of those killed in the fire. The family members were eventually allowed to march and most held aloft photos of loved ones lost in the fire.

4. (C) In addition, the unions' rejection of El Fassi's social package figured prominently in the demonstrations. To a lesser

extent, Arab solidarity with Palestinians and Iraqis was also featured. However, for the first time in many years, there was no significant evidence of anti-Americanism. There were no reports of unrest or violence during the marches.

A Show of Strength from El Fassi

¶5. (C) On May 1, Morocco's Prime Minister, Abbas El Fassi, announced his intention to implement a social investment package which had been rejected by the five major unions just days before. The highlight of the package, a ten percent increase in the guaranteed minimum wage (SMIG) over the next two years, falls far short of the immediate thirty percent increase demanded by the unions. Other concessions by the government fall short of union demands as well. It appears, however, that the GOM's strategy is based on the view that immediate action and money in the pockets of the workers will appease them. The first tranche of benefits, to be implemented in July, includes a five percent increase in the SMIG.

Strike One...Strike Two...Who's Out

¶6. (U) During the May Day union rallies, discussion focused on impending strikes. Within days at least four unions announced their plans of action. The UMT, the Democratic Federation of Workers (FDT), which is affiliated with the government's Popular Union of Socialist Forces (USFP), and the Democratic Workers Organization (ODT) have all called for general strikes on May 13. The CDT, however, has called for a national strike in all sectors, public and

private, on May 21. According to CDT Secretary General Noubir Amaoui, the strike will include the transportation, telecommunications and tourism sectors. Amaoui announced that his union is striking to protest "the high cost of living, the unbearable increase in prices, and the unequal distribution of national wealth."

The unions say they are poised to demonstrate to the GOM that they can mobilize their members and, according to Amaoui, "paralyze every sector."

Comment

¶7. (C) Moroccan workers are clearly disgruntled with the high cost of living and labor unions are moving quickly to protect their members' interests and advance their own organizational interests as well. However, the GOM strategy of attempting to put cash into the hands of workers before the financial pressures of school-year start-up costs and Ramadan in September may turn out to be at least partially successful. Strikes slated for later this month have the potential to reflect the same lack of enthusiasm shown on May 1. The unions' historic foot-dragging and table-thumping may have been enough to dampen the confidence of laborers. Participation in the May 13 and 21 strikes should indicate whether Moroccan workers are satisfied for now with the GOM offer or are clamoring for more action from the unions.

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